

Much has been said regarding the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, its impact on the Gulf of Mexico and our nation's Gulf Coast. Yet despite these conversations, many Americans remain in the dark about three things: 1) the string of events that led to this situation; 2) what is currently being done to protect the delicate ecosystems that are at the forefront of this disaster; and 3) the steps being taken to ensure that this does not happen again.

First – it is important to remember that this is not a natural disaster, it is a human-made one. It is BP's disaster and one that could have been wholly prevented. On 20 April, when the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded killing 11 people, the blowout preventer, as the device is known, failed. The story, however, extends well before the April 20th

incident to the industry's atrocious safety record and years of lobbying against stricter regulations. Reports have indicated that BP was

[aware of a leak](#)

in the Deepwater oil rig's safety equipment weeks before the explosion and did nothing to fix it. In addition, just last year, the British oil giant

[argued against stricter safety regulations](#)

for the oil industry in letters to the Mineral Management Service stating it was not necessary. Even further, in 2001 BP joined several other oil producers in defeating a regulatory proposal that would have required a remote-control shut-off switch in all oil wells; something that is required by Brazil and Norway, two other major oil-producing nations as well as used voluntarily by several other oil producers such as Royal Dutch Shell. Experts have gone on record as saying the remote-control switch could have shut off the Deepwater Horizon well and avoided this disaster.

All these events point to one thing and one thing alone: that the oil industry has had way too much sway in regulations and safety practices over the past two decades. This is disconcerting, unacceptable and needs to end now. BP and other contractors are ultimately responsible for paying for the entirety of the disaster cleanup and will be held fully accountable for all costs related to this spill, including its impact on the Gulf Coast's economy and residents. An overwhelming amount of public consensus points to this being the only course of action and while some Republicans in Congress such as Rep. Joe Barton, Ranking Republican on the

House Energy and Commerce Committee and Rep. Steve King are apologizing to the CEO of BP Tony Hayward, I promise you I will put the interests of the residents of the Gulf, not private corporations, first. In this regard you can rest assured, I will work with my colleagues in Congress continue to ensure that the Administration has what it needs now to get the job done in the Gulf of Mexico—and that taxpayers will be repaid.

Second – all practical efforts to contain the oil spill and save our coastline are already well underway. The day of the rig explosion, President Obama assembled his team in the Oval office and immediately began disaster preparations. The Coast Guard saved 115 people from the rig and resources from multiple agencies, the National Guard and the US military were deployed. **17,500 National Guard** troops are now active in the Gulf. Currently, More than **5,360 vessels** are assisting with clean up efforts, including skimmers, tugs, barges and recovery vessels. The Coast Guard has been on site since day one. The Administration has deployed more than **5.4 million feet of total boom** to help stop the oil from coming on shore –including more than 100,000 feet of boom heading to Louisiana parishes that are facing the greatest risk from the oil. I still remain concerned about BP's candor on the total amount of oil still spilling into our oceans. With the latest estimate pegged at 100,000 barrels of oil a day, nearly twenty times as much as originally thought, I will continue my efforts to ensure that BP becomes more transparent in its recovery efforts.

Third – Congress is currently working to help the hardest hit areas and the families that make their livelihoods on the Gulf. Congress has already passed S. 3473 to permit the Coast Guard to obtain one or more advances from the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund to underwrite federal response activities related to the BP/Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. The American Jobs and Closing Tax Loopholes Act moving through Congress would protect coastal economies by making oil companies pay to strengthen the solvency of the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund—instead of passing the bill on to taxpayers. As Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, I have been particularly active in working to ensure that the federal agencies helping the impacted communities do so in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way – there is a large Vietnamese American community in the region as well as other communities that may have significant populations with limited English proficiency who need help in a way they can understand. In addition, Committees are looking at addressing the current limit on liability for economic damages to ensure that the responsible parties, and not

Gulf Oil Spill: Looking Back and Ahead

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the taxpayer, pay for lost wages, property and other damages. The House is also working on legislation to ensure the families of the individuals who died on the Deepwater Horizon are able to obtain appropriate compensation, split up the Minerals Management Service, improve review of offshore drilling and spill response plans and ensure the safety of workers on oil rigs and those involved in the cleanup. Speaker Pelosi has asked committee chairs to work to finish committee consideration of legislation in response to the BP Oil Spill by July 4.

This disaster also brings to light fundamental questions about our energy policy and the actions we undertake to pursue it. I recently wrote an Op-Ed on this issue, which can be [found here](#).